

CLAIM AMENDMENTS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1-27 (cancelled)

28. (Currently amended) A method of vacuum thermoforming a container which includes an outer surface including an outwardly-projecting ridge, the container further including a base, side walls, and an inwardly-projecting cut lip, the method comprising:

(a) providing a three-part mold defining a cavity conforming in shape to the outer surface of the container, the cavity including an undercut portion corresponding to the ridge of the container, the mold including separable first, second and third portions, the first portion including a planar upper surface and an upper lip, the first portion defining an upper part of the undercut portion, the second portion defining a lower part of the undercut portion and further defining a surface corresponding to the side walls of the container, the first and second portions of the mold being separable along a part line located along the ridge of the container, the third portion defining a surface corresponding to the base of the container, the cavity being shaped so that the separated thermoplastic material is a shell having a base surrounded by integrally formed side walls extending upward to a cut lip, the walls and base formed of a single thermoplastic sheet and defining a volume, the side walls including a ridge below the cut lip, the ridge protruding away from the volume and being sized to support the shell on a lower surface of the ridge against a cut lip of a second identical shell with the bases of the two shells spaced apart when the shell is nested within the second identical shell, the cut lip extending inward about the volume;

(b) positioning a heated sheet of thermoplastic material over the mold;

(c) drawing the heated sheet of thermoplastic material over the upper lip of the mold and down into the cavity and into the undercut portion of the mold;

(d) allowing the drawn thermoplastic material to cool below its glass transition temperature;

(e) after said allowing, cutting the thermoplastic material along the upper lip of the mold to separate the drawn thermoplastic material in the mold cavity from the remainder of the thermoplastic material;

(f) separating the first, ~~and second, and third~~ portions of the mold whereby the second and third pieces move downwardly away from the first piece until the third piece contacts an ejector plug, the second piece thereafter continuing downward until clear of the container, and

(g) removing the thermoformed container from the second and third portions of the mold.

29. (previously presented) The method of claim 28 wherein the cavity includes at least one ejector pin for pushing the formed thermoplastic material from the cavity prior to said removing.

30. (cancelled).

31. (cancelled)

32. (cancelled)

33. (previously presented) The method of claim ²⁸~~32~~ wherein the cavity is shaped so that the ridge has at least one wall obtusely angled with respect to an adjoining portion of the side wall so that a gap is formed between ridges of the two shells when they are nested.

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34. (previously presented) The method of claim 30 wherein the cavity is shaped so that the upwardly extending walls include a ridge below the cut lip, the ridge protruding away from the volume and extending around the entire periphery of the upwardly extending walls.

35. (previously presented) The method of claim 28 wherein said removing is between the first and second portions.

36. (previously presented) The method of claim 28 wherein said cutting is before said separating.

37. (previously presented) The method of claim 28 wherein said separating is by lowering the second portion from the first portion.

38. (previously presented) The method of claim 28 wherein said cutting is after said allowing.

39. (Currently amended) A method of vacuum thermoforming a container which includes an outer surface including an outwardly-projecting ridge, a base, side walls, and an inwardly-projecting cut lip, the method comprising:

providing a three-part mold defining a cavity conforming in shape to the outer surface of the container, the cavity including an undercut portion corresponding to the ridge of the container, the mold including separable first, second and third portions, the first portion including a planar upper surface and an upper lip, the first portion defining an upper part of the undercut portion, the second portion defining a lower part of the undercut portion and further defining a surface corresponding to the side walls of the container, the first and second portions of the mold being separable along a part line located along the ridge of the container, the third portion defining a surface corresponding to the base of the container, the cavity being shaped so that the separated thermoplastic material is a shell having a base surrounded by integrally formed

side walls extending upward to a cut lip, the walls and base formed of a single thermoplastic sheet and defining a volume, the side walls including a ridge below the cut lip, the ridge protruding away from the volume and being sized to support the shell on a lower surface of the ridge against a cut lip of a second identical shell with the bases of the two shells spaced apart when the shell is nested within the second identical shell, the cut lip extending inward about the volume;

positioning a heated sheet of thermoplastic material over the mold;

drawing the heated sheet of thermoplastic material over the mold and into the cavity and into the undercut portion of the mold;

allowing the drawn thermoplastic material to cool below its glass transition temperature;

after said allowing, cutting the cooled thermoplastic material along the upper lip of the mold to separate the drawn thermoplastic material in the mold cavity from the remainder of the thermoplastic material;

separating the first, and second, and third portions of the mold whereby the second and third pieces move downwardly away from the first piece until the third piece contacts an ejector plug, the second piece thereafter continuing downward until clear of the container; and

removing the thermoformed container from the second and third portions of the mold.

40. (previously presented) The method of claim 39 wherein said removing is from below the first portion of the mold.

41. (previously presented) The method of claim 39 wherein said cutting is before said separating.